

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Fisheries Division**

April 28, 2008

Proposal to review the daily bag limit for salmon

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is considering a change in bag limit regulations for some salmon species in the Great Lakes and connected rivers. This review is in response to requests from anglers over the past two decades, and especially the last three years, for the Department to consider changes to the current daily bag limits for Chinook salmon and coho salmon. Potential changes in regulations would be applied statewide.

1. What are the current regulations for trout and salmon in the Great Lakes?
 - Atlantic salmon, Brook trout, Brown trout, Chinook salmon, Coho salmon, Lake trout, Pink salmon, Rainbow trout and Splake: 5 in any combination but no more than 3 of any one species, except that up to 5 pink salmon may be harvested.
2. How long have the current regulations been in place?
 - The current daily bag limits have been in place on all trout and salmon (except Lake trout) since April 1, 1989. Prior to that date the daily limit for all trout and salmon species was 5 in any combination, except for lake trout.
3. Which species are being considered for a change in the daily bag limit?
 - Chinook and coho salmon only.
4. Why are Chinook and Coho Salmon the only species being considered?
 - Anglers throughout the Great Lakes are generally satisfied with the daily bag limit for the other trout and salmon species. An opportunity exists to consider a higher daily bag limit for these two species.
5. What is the new proposal?
 - The daily bag limit for Chinook and coho salmon could be increased to 5 per day. The regulation would read “5 in any combination but no more than 3 of any one species, except that up to 5 Chinook, Coho, or Pink salmon may be harvested.
6. Why would the bag limit change for these two species be considered for all the lakes?
 - The Department is committed to making regulations less confusing. Changing the daily bag limit for these two species across all four lakes would be consistent with this commitment. In addition, all other State and Provincial jurisdictions bordering the four Great Lakes currently have a 5 fish daily bag limit for these species.
7. Why the focus on daily bag limits; have you considered changing size or season restrictions?
 - Virtually no trout or salmon are caught and harvested below the designated size limit of 10 inches and, except for lake trout and splake, the season for trout and salmon in the Great Lakes is already open all year. Daily bag limits are generally viewed by biologists as a

tool to limit fishing exploitation by experienced anglers while attempting to distribute harvest more equitably among all anglers. Research has shown that the vast majority of anglers do not catch the allowed daily bag limit. Based on those findings, bag limits tend to be modified based on social consideration rather than biological factors.

8. Why are daily bag limits not very effective for Chinook or coho salmon?
 - Natural mortality sources on fish populations exert the most control over their numbers in the wild. In fact, natural mortality rates in most fish populations are higher than fishing mortality rates, especially for most Great Lakes populations.
9. What are the potential biological implications of this proposal?
 - For all practical reasons there are none. Biologically it is unnecessary to restrict harvest for these two species to 3 per day, although it is possible that higher bag limits could, in rare circumstances, negatively effect natural reproduction of salmon. In most years increasing the daily bag limit to 5 fish for Chinook and coho salmon would result in very small increases in total harvest. Maintaining lower bag limits may restrict harvest of fish when their abundance and catch rates are very high. When abundance and catch rates are very high, a few more anglers might catch their limit.
10. What would be the potential effect on fisheries if the daily bag limit was increased?
 - While the vast majority of anglers do not catch their limit of these species, there are rare and potentially localized circumstances where a higher daily bag limit could possibly result in some level of reduction in natural reproduction by these species in Michigan's rivers. In addition, greater fishing effort on streams could result in increased harassment of spawning fish, thus indirectly reducing natural reproduction.
 - A higher daily bag limit may be more consistent with management of the open lake fisheries. Although highly unlikely, in extremely rare circumstances there is a small possibility that additional harvest might help to mitigate any unbalance in predator and prey populations.
 - Since angler effort and harvest could be higher in select waters, there could be a potential increase in user conflicts between anglers, especially in river systems.
11. Does the proposal include changes to the daily bag limit for these two species in rivers and streams?
 - Yes. Regardless of where these species are caught, the daily bag limit would be consistent to ensure simplicity of regulations for the fishing public.
12. If there are relatively few biological implications then this must be primarily a social issue, correct?
 - Correct. In previous reviews of fishing regulations for the Great Lakes, the angling community noted that while harvesting fish is important, harvest should not be concentrated on a few successful anglers. For nearly two decades the three fish limit for these two species has generally been viewed by the public as sufficient harvest for one trip.

13. What are the potential positive and negative aspects of this proposal from a social perspective?
- There may be unintended shifts in fishing effort. For example, anglers may fish longer to get the limit, make more or less trips, or they may quit fishing because the limit is unattainable.
 - There may be unrealistic changes in expectations. The daily bag limit is frequently used as a benchmark of success by anglers. Increasing the bag limit will most likely decrease satisfaction with the fishery over time since the expectation of anglers will be to achieve the higher limit each day. Achieving the limit will become increasingly difficult as the bag limit is increased.
 - A reasonable number of fish to harvest can be a personal choice, so increasing the bag limit may not be important to some anglers.
14. When would this change be effective?
- April 1, 2009 at the earliest.
15. Are public comments being accepted?
- Yes, public comments are being accepted through June 13, 2008, via e-mail to DNR-FISHSalmon-Limits@michigan.gov or letters sent to Fisheries Division, PO Box 30446, Lansing, MI 48909. Comments will also be accepted after June 13, 2008, through various forums such as Natural Resources Commission meetings.